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SUBJECT: MORE CRITICS TAKE AIM AT MALI'S EMBATTLED AUDITOR
GENERAL

REF: A. BAMAKO 00055

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1.(SBU) Summary: The international donor community witnessed another salvo directed at Mali's embattled Auditor General, Sidi Sosso Diarra, on February 27 when a member of Diarra's own staff disrupted a routine donors' meeting to publicly lambaste his boss. Diarra has been mired in political and legal battles since November 2008 when details of a Supreme Court audit revealing financial irregularities within Diarra's office were leaked to the Malian press. Although Diarra has steadfastly refused to resign or bend to political pressure, a public uprising of his own staff is just the latest indication of the weakened nature of Mali's only independent corruption fighting institution. On March 14 Oumou Toure, the President of Mali's largest women's association, used a forum on anti-corruption and good governance to accuse Diarra - who was sitting next to Toure on the dais - of failing to live up to his corruption fighting responsibilities. On March 20 Diarra used a five minute segment with Radio France to deflect mounting criticism, responding as he has throughout with measured assessments of his successes and failures as Auditor General. Although Diarra has clearly made mistakes, the real culprit may be Mali's judiciary which has yet to prosecute any of the offenders identified since the OAG's first report in 2007. End Summary.

A Staff Uprising

2.(SBU) Auditor General Sidi Sosso Diarra's annual meeting with Mali's international donor community took an unusual and unexpected turn on February 27 when Diarra's own deputy, Modibo Diallo, rose suddenly to accuse Diarra of ignoring a December 2008 court ruling ordering him to reinstate eight employees previously dismissed from the Office of the Auditor General (OAG). Prior to Diallo's outburst, Diarra briefed international donors on the OAG's achievements for 2008 and plans for 2009. Diarra noted that the OAG completed more than 30 auditing missions in 2008, resulting in specific recommendations to each Ministry and government agency audited. Diarra indicated that most of these recommendations had already been implemented by the relevant government institutions, and cited as an example a recommendation to the Ministry of Education that it distribute to schools thousands of textbooks still sitting in its warehouses. The OAG intends to conduct 45 audits in 2009 using a slightly modified and, according to Diarra, streamlined approach based on lessons learned from previous OAG evaluation missions.

3.(SBU) As the collegial and generally upbeat meeting came to a close, Deputy Auditor General Modibo Diallo, who had hitherto been silent during the 90 minute discussion, suddenly declared that the Auditor General's optimism had obscured one glaring issue: Diarra's disregard for court rulings to reinstate eight OAG employees. Diarra dismissed these employees, who were on long-term loan to the OAG from

other government Ministries, in December 2008 ostensibly to preserve the OAG's political independence (Ref. A). Although Diarra claimed he was simply returning the eight individuals to their home Ministries, the employees filed suit alleging wrongful dismissal and demanding reinstatement.

4.(SBU) The group of eight is led by Daniel Tessougue, who as Secretary General of the Ministry of Justice, was the number two person in the Justice Ministry prior to being seconded to the OAG. Since the Secretary General position is now occupied by another individual, Tessougue has no hope of returning to his previous position. On February 5 the Administrative Section of the Supreme Court rejected Diarra's rationale for dismissing the eight employees and ordered their reinstatement. Diarra has yet to comply with this ruling. This is perhaps not surprising given Diarra's strained relationship with the Supreme Court. Diarra's current problems were ignited by the November 2008 leak of a supposedly confidential audit of the OAG by the Supreme Court's accounting division (Ref. B).

Criticism from other Quarters

5.(SBU) On March 14 Diarra received an earful from another somewhat unexpected critic - Oumou Toure, the president of Coordination of Women's Associations and NGOs (CAFO). CAFO is the umbrella organization for more than 2000 women's groups in Mali. As such, CAFO holds a permanent seat on Mali's fifteen member Independent National Election Commission (CENI) and generally serves as the main advocate,

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clearinghouse, and representative for women's groups in Mali. Although Toure's apparent status as CAFO's president for life has raised transparency questions of its own, she accused Diarra, who was sitting next to her as one of the other conference participants, of falling down on the job. "In all sincerity," said Toure, "we need to say what we think of this institution because the corrupt and the corrupters are unknown. We believe that the Auditor General is not doing his job. What sectors of public life are the corrupt coming from? None of them have been penalized. These are the sentiments that are motivating us, Mr. Auditor General." Diarra responded, as he normally does, with a measured assessment of the progress of the OAG and a quick reference to judiciary's responsibility for following up on cases of corruption identified by the OAG.

6.(SBU) Oumou Toure's attack came amidst a prolonged media campaign by one local newspaper in particular to publicize Diarra's legal and administrative troubles. On March 20 Radio France (RFI) invited Diarra to respond to allegations in the press and elsewhere that Diarra is not "Mr. Clean." Diarra told RFI that he remained indifferent to these charges. In response to specific allegations that he is charging the government CFA 350,000 more than the CFA 500,000 (USD 1,000) allotted for the Auditor General's monthly residential lease payments, Diarra said President Amadou Toumani Toure had personally approved the increased rental payments several years before - a revelation that seemingly deflated at least one ethics charge but raised other questions regarding Diarra's claims about the need to preserve OAG independence from the presidency and other branches of the Malian government.

7.(SBU) Diarra also noted that he received no health benefits or security as Auditor General even though, in his view, he encumbers one of the most "exposed" positions in the country. At the close of the interview Diarra said his office continued to enjoy the full support of President Toure and reaffirmed his commitment to remain Auditor General until the expiration of his seven year appointment in 2011.

8.(SBU) On March 4 an official with the Canadian Embassy,

which is one of the OAG's primary financial donors, told the Embassy that President Toure had confidence in the work of the Auditor General and noted the general adoption of OAG recommendations regarding management deficiencies, resulting improved government operations. Coincidentally, the Canadians then cited the same example - the Ministry of Education's textbooks - that Diarra provided during the February donor meeting. When asked about evident delays - or worse - regarding legal investigations into cases of fraud referred by the OAG, the Canadians suggested the delay did not signal a lack of political will to address corruption but rather a lack of technical competence on behalf of Malian magistrates to hear cases involving economic and financial crimes.

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Comment: Justice and a Weakened Auditor General
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9.(SBU) The media campaign and court rulings against Diarra, together with the apparent eagerness of individuals like CAFO president Oumou Toure to jump on the anti-OAG bandwagon, do not bode well for Diarra. The ultimate victim, however, may not be Diarra but law abiding government officials and private sector operators striving to outpace corruption's pull. Recent allegations have clearly weakened not only Diarra but the Office of the Auditor General, making it easier for critics to dismiss or discredit future OAG findings. Ironically, Diarra's image could be bolstered by the very institution that has, since his appointment as Auditor General, so evidently let him down: the judiciary. Unfortunately, Malian courts appear more interested in auditing the Auditor General than investigating the very real corruption cases the Auditor General's reports have already served up.
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